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A foreign language and culture program is advocated in place of the traditional language and literature program in today's schools. The potential importance of television and films in presenting cultural context is stressed, but the poor caliber of existing foreign language television programs in the United States (with a few notable exceptions) is criticized. The poor quality is attributed to lack of professionalism in the preparation of such programs and insufficient publicizing of the good ones. Some of the better programs which point the way to a revitalized language program are identified and described. (AF)

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The Sound of Pictures

ELTON HOCKING, *Purdue University*

"THE principal's directive says we must tune in the Spanish lesson every time, but it doesn't say we can't turn the TV around so it faces the wall."

This helpful hint to the new teacher is probably apocryphal, but it illustrates teacher attitude at its worst. Truthful or not, the anecdote reminds us that even the best TV instruction depends on the classroom teacher. His enthusiastic attitude and systematic follow-up, says the research, are more important than his linguistic skills; the TV teacher, in turn, can indeed provide the basic instruction but not total teaching.[1]

How good are the various foreign language TV series, and what makes them good? To answer these questions the NATIONAL CENTER FOR SCHOOL AND COLLEGE TELEVISION last year brought together a score of expert colleagues who viewed sample lessons (videotapes or films and the related printed materials) from some ninety series, most of them for the elementary school. Predictably, the range in quality was extreme; disappointingly, the average was poor. The half-dozen superior series cheered the optimist by showing the great potential of TV instruction, but the pessimist feared that dozens of wretched TV series had discredited the medium—and perhaps also foreign language learning itself—in dozens of communities. Why had so many failed so badly?

The Last of the Cottage Industries

Do-it-yourself is a Great American Tradition, nowhere stronger than in our 23,000 public school systems. Somehow we think it undemocratic not to assume that one superintendent's opinion is as good as another's—or perhaps even better. Home movies are fine, provided that they are our own, and TV is just another camera. The PTA clamors for FLES; the local TV station promises free time; Miss Jones has a free period and she had French in college, so we'll put her on. And the daily newspaper will praise us for being progressive.

Exaggerated? Scarcely so, to those of us who spent three days viewing sample lessons at the NATIONAL CENTER. With only a few exceptions, notably "Parlons Français," they demonstrated tedious teaching and inept television techniques. Instead of "the world at your fingertips" one saw only the local classroom with Miss Jones expounding the familiar textbook.[2] And thanks to videotape, she has achieved a dubious immortality. Perhaps Shakespeare was thinking of videotape when he wrote: "The evil that men do lives after them."

The sole redeeming feature was the presence of some excellence in the midst of so much mediocrity, and the knowledge that many good programs have been made abroad.

"It is generally conceded that other countries—Britain, Japan, France, Italy—have outdistanced the United States. . . . Broadcasting facilities are owned and operated by the government in these countries, and most educational TV is produced in centers for national or regional distribution."[3]

The inference is clear: centralized production for wide distribution implies big budgets, expert producers and performers, technical resources, adequate time (for planning, rehearsals and retakes)—in short, professionalism. Of the foreign-made series the best known in this country, since it was widely shown a few years ago by the National Broadcasting Company, was "En France comme si vous y étiez." The most popular (and costly) American series, although largely filmed in France, is of course "Parlons Français," which has, alas, not been a financial success.[4] The revised version of "En France,"

[1] Earle S. Randall, "Research Results in Three Large Televised FLES Programs," *MLA FLES Packet*, New York: The Modern Language Association of America, 1967.

[2] The published report is available free from NATIONAL CENTER FOR SCHOOL AND COLLEGE TELEVISION, Box A, Bloomington, Indiana 47401. Ask for *NCSCT News*, Supplement No. 7.

[3] Judith Murphy and Ronald Gross, *Learning by Television*, New York: The Fund for the Advancement of Education, 1966.

[4] Although production has not been continued, the complete three-year sequence (160 films and all the supporting materials) is still available from D. C. Heath and Company.

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intended for American school use, is scarcely known to our profession. Apparently at work here is a kind of Gresham's Law: bad TV programs drive out the good ones.

Sadder still, the counterfeit TV programs were produced in all good faith. Attracted by the glamor of the new medium, spurred by public pressure, and driven to expedients by tight budgets, mounting enrollments and the teacher shortage, the local administrator seized upon TV teaching as a quick and easy solution. Neither he nor Miss Jones knew that dozens of other school districts were doing likewise, creating a new product with their bare hands, as it were. Such was the origin of the last of the cottage industries—primitive but cheap. Each cottage was individually inventing the wheel, so to speak, not knowing that modern bus service was already available at the doorstep. And so the bus line went bankrupt.

Our Waning "Establishment"

There is grim irony in the fact that the demise of excellent TV series goes unmourned by many of our colleagues, for they do not realize that the bell tolls for them, and indeed for all of us in foreign language teaching. Regardless of what the mediocre broadcasts may have done for our students, they surely brought the local classroom into the pitiless view of the public. Parents were disillusioned by what they saw and heard—mostly liturgical drills performed by Miss Jones, with antiphonal student responses in the background. The intellectual and pedagogical poverty of such performances contrasted sharply with the cultural riches of the foreign-made series, and of course with the expertness of commercial TV. As a result, not only did our TV performance look bad; our subject itself suffered, and our reputation was tarnished.

A national poll indicates that our prestige among parents is low. When the Gallup organization questioned a cross-section of parents in order to determine what goals they wanted their children to achieve in school, the tabulated choices showed a list of forty-eight goals, in order of importance. At the very bottom of the list was "the ability to read or speak a foreign language."[5]

The Gallup publication terms this result "amazing," but it concludes: "It would be a great mistake to draw the conclusion that parents want only a strictly utilitarian type of education. Their attitudes toward the development of cultural interests and personal qualities refute this. . . . They want the type of education which fits the needs of present-day life in America."[6]

It is easy to reply that our enrollments are now at their highest and that we teachers never had it so good. But the fact remains that only twenty percent of our beginners continue into Level III, and that our students in Level IV and above number a mere three percent of all high-school upperclassmen.[7] This situation may get worse rather than better. Our great friend and benefactor, William Riley Parker, warned us recently: "The present popularity of language teachers is basically illusive; it can disappear as dramatically and unexpectedly as it appeared.[8]

A compelling reason for this dismal prophecy is the cumulative impact of students' frustration with our subject. Later, as taxpayers or school board members, or even as teachers or administrators, they are less than enthusiastic about our subject. Meanwhile, we who are enthusiastic seldom attain positions of influence. A recent survey in the state of Washington revealed that only four percent of the high-school principals had taught a foreign language. And how many of our clan have become college deans or presidents? How great is our influence (or our interest) in the world of public education?

With parents and students deserting us, and with our lack of general influence, it seems probable that our major support is found in the requirements for college entrance and graduation. It is disquieting that students come to us because forced to do so, and it is unlikely that the force will be maintained indefinitely. Although there is renewed talk these days about the value of the humanities, such talk seems scarcely to concern us, for it is hard to prove the

[5] *Parents' Reactions to Educational Innovations.* Princeton, New Jersey: Gallup International, Inc., 1966, p. 21.

[6] Ibid., p. 30.

[7] Derived from *Fall 1965 FL Offerings and Enrollments in Public Secondary Schools,* New York: The Modern Language Association of America, 1967.

[8] "Foreword," *The Modern Language Journal,* Vol. L, No. 6 (October 1966), p. 324.

humanistic value of our Levels I and II. Even Level III can hardly qualify, for it is usually a premature struggle with literary works for which the student is linguistically and culturally unprepared. To fight one's way through a masterpiece, constantly thumbing the dictionary, is not a cultural experience but a manual exercise.

Nevertheless, if our subject is to survive in the general curriculum, we must stake our claim on its humanistic value for the majority of all young people. Not necessarily a four-year or a six-year requirement, which is patently impossible for most youngsters (and most schools), but an elective sequence which, at whatever time it may be dropped, has permanent value of a humanistic nature. How can we provide such an experience?

Language and Culture

First of all, we must substitute "language and culture" as our program, in place of the traditional "language and literature," which implies that the only purpose of language study is to read the literature. Although still popular in our colleges, this concept dates from the age when education was only for an elite minority. Today our society, and especially our young people, demand not only "education for all" but education that is relevant to the unprecedented needs and hopes and fears of contemporary life. But this does not mean merely practical or utilitarian training. Our educational leaders now recognize that the "culturally deprived" are not only the ghetto-dwellers but also the suburbanites whose lives and schools are sterile.

Let me quote an officer of the NATIONAL ASSOCIATION OF SECONDARY SCHOOL PRINCIPALS: "A fundamental revolution is rocking the thought and value systems of the younger generation [and] it is reinforced by adult fear. . . . Any sensitive observer must see. . . a profoundly disturbed generation of idealistic youth in search of values to live by. . . .

"[New forces] are about to reshape American secondary education [and] they will hit hardest upon vocational education, the social studies, and a new humanities program. . . .

"Our main resource lies in the humanities. . . . We shall have to reach beyond the aesthetics of art, music and literature [to] a new setting and a new way of teaching, for the humanities cannot be "learned," linear fashion, as science is learned. . . . What we are after here is the very best of the long tradition of *liberal education*. . . .

"Yeh, even more fundamentally all the youth . . . deserve our help. And to give it to them we shall have to shuck off a lot of scholastic impedimenta. . . ."[9]

Here is a great opportunity for us language teachers, provided that we shuck off our own impedimenta: mindless drills, routine translation, the premature plunge into literature, and derivative talk *about* literature or language or culture. If we are to find our place in the new humanities curriculum we must indeed find "a new setting and a new way of teaching." To help us do this, we can call upon the new means of communication—primarily films and television.

The Cultural Context

Let it be repeated at once that television and films (used here almost as synonyms) are no panacea for our ills, as the demonstration at the National Center revealed all too clearly. But no less clear, in a few instances, was the great potential. And we all know by now that television can teach, that the average youngster spends more time at the TV set than in school, and that the commercial advertiser influences him more than we do.

There is no question of instructional TV replacing us and doing what we do; that has been tried and it failed. It is rather a question of its doing what we cannot do—putting the language into its authentic context of contemporary foreign life and bringing that life into our classrooms, in sight and sound. This immediacy, this compelling illusion of "you are there," constitutes the so-called magic of television. For our students it provides a "cultural island" far more effective than our classroom posters and bulletin boards. It is, in short, an endless source of motivation for the learner—and also for us teachers, who sometimes need it no less.

In addition to intrinsic motivation, the imported sound film or videotape provides the full range of authentic cultural meaning. It suits the action to the word, and the word to the action.

[9] Abridged from Fred T. Wilhelms, "Which Way to a Curriculum for Adolescents?" *NEA Journal*, Vol. 56, No. 9 (December 1967), pp. 12–15.

But more is involved than mere words or phrases, for intonations and stresses and pauses acquire special significance from gestures and facial expressions. The visual context specifies also the level of language—a vital aspect of style and even of simple denotation. "It wasn't so much what he said, but the way he said it!" And the way he said it was vocal and visual, not typographical.

When reading in our native language, we find the graphic symbols more or less adequate to evoke the appropriate vocal and visual imagery, depending on our retentiveness, sensitivity, and breadth of experience. (Even here it can be argued that the experience is modified by the medium which conveys it, and that the drama, for example, or the motion picture requires a new definition of "literacy.") But the student reading a foreign language is in double jeopardy. To the extent that the graphic symbols are unfamiliar, they divert him to the bilingual dictionary—or "vocabulary" at the end of the book; there he finds familiar symbols that inevitably evoke the imagery of his own experience. Although the book before him is in Spanish or French, his mind is engaging in a kind of bilingual double-talk, with the output in English. In effect, he is devising a primitive translation, linguistic and cultural. By diligent work he can follow the plot, but he misses almost everything else; he might better read the translation of a professional.

A flagrant example of such double-talk in our classrooms is the choral pledge of allegiance to our flag—in German or Russian! This absurd performance reveals the need of what might be called double-awareness, possessed only by those who are experienced in two cultures. These persons are sensitive to language beyond mere denotation; they appreciate that, to the loyal Russian, "Red Flag" and "Red Square" connote beauty rather than color; they also respond to the connotations of such a phrase as "Old Glory," as opposed to "the flag of the United States of America," and they shudder when they hear our school children chanting: "I pledge a legion. . . ."

Connotations, associations, allusions to the cultural patrimony—all are interwoven by linguistic artifice to form the fabric of literary works. But the many threads of native lore and life are foreign to our monocultural students, who can only ask, in their frustration, "What does the poem mean?", when the real question is, as John Ciardi puts it: *How* does the poem mean?

He is right, of course, although his question baffles many students even in our English courses. Whether in verse or prose, the *how* is the essence of art, but it must rest on the *what*, which in turn is experience expressed in language. When both of these are foreign to our students, then both must be imported.

The alternative is to export our students, so that they may acquire the authentic experience and language *in situ*. A privileged few do go abroad, but millions of them don't and can't. However, thanks to electronics, the foreign experience itself can now be imported for these landlocked youngsters. By film and television it is reproduced rather than described, shared rather than observed. By eliminating the trivial, the art of editing emphasizes the significant aspects of contemporary life, and by faithfully re-enacting history, enables us to "see it now." The sight and the sound of pictures bring the cultural experience to all.

Our Underprivileged Classrooms

"A tenth grade dropout is writing poetry for a magazine that circulates in the very school where he failed in English. A young man working as a janitor for a bar has written a novel. A boy [from the slums] has gone on to Stanford, has a book contract, and has published in *Harper's*, *Pageant*, and other magazines. These are some of the things I've seen happen in Watts that seem to me to have implications for high schools in slum areas all over the country.

"To me, our Workshop experience suggests that we need to stop measuring school success by the ability of the student to play the game, to conform, to absorb everything without regard to his particular talents or preferences. We need schools to reach out to the offbeat ones and tap their hidden wells of talent."[10]

Not all children, of course, have "hidden wells of talent," but we language teachers have tended to attract those—especially those girls—who "play the game, conform, absorb

[10] Budd Schulberg, "It Could Happen in the Schools," *NEA Journal*, Vol. 56, No. 9 (December 1967), p. 19.

everything." Yet there are some public schools in which, as Conant relates from his own observation: ". . . quite a number of students elected a modern foreign language and carried it through for four years because they liked it. They had done well, although they did not have the kind of ability that would enable them to take mathematics much beyond the tenth grade."[11]

Clearly, the "kind of ability" involved is not mathematical, nor, as research now tells us, is it measured by I.Q. tests. We do not know how to describe or assess it, but we can nurture and develop it.

Among leaders of public education there is a call to democratize culture without vulgarizing it, and to bring it to all children in the elementary school. In this connection, we recall Howard and Frances Nostrand's advocacy of a cultural FLES sequence using, in the lowest grades, filmed episodes of foreign children's activities; in the intermediate grades, situational dialogs which "are best presented through a coordinated use of films, filmstrips and tapes."[12] Many of us are also aware of Mr. Nostrand's pioneering use of filmed recitations of verse and prose as interpreted by a French professional actor. When tried out in elementary schools, these French films elicited the child's intuitive response to beauty.[13] As for showing the daily life of French children, there are abundant resources in the filmed version of "Parlons Français." In Spanish there is the excellent film-and-text course by Encyclopaedia Britannica.

Such materials point the way to the enlightened presentation of the humanities as experience rather than information, and therefore meaningful to children in general. Thanks to the leadership of professional organizations and the guidance of the NATIONAL CENTER FOR SCHOOL AND COLLEGE TELEVISION, more such materials are being developed in art, music, and other subjects. In the foreign language field a few promising TV programs are getting under way; let us hope that vigorous national leadership will be provided by the recently-founded AMERICAN COUNCIL ON THE TEACHING OF FOREIGN LANGUAGES. A logical first step would be to develop an awareness of the resources already available to us.

"I understand that there are tapes and films or filmstrips for this textbook, but I have not seen them." Such is commonly the cavalier attitude of our book reviewers. In the case of the MLA-sponsored *Modern Spanish*, for example, the valuable series of 24 films went unmentioned in the review in *Hispania*, the publisher did not list them in his catalog, and the producer lacked funds for publicizing them. Result: most teachers have never heard of them. One gets the impression that our "establishment" is content to remain an impenetrable little enclave in the world of modern education.[14]

Without a revitalized leadership, the initiative will surely be taken by the new curriculum research centers and by those vast new combines of publishers and electronics firms. Possessed of great resources and unhampered by the heavy hand of tradition or by dogmatic educational philosophy, they can move confidently to provide a rich cultural experience to all our children. With or without our participation, as we choose, the multisensory new materials will be devised, to the benefit of the humanities and to the discomfiture of Miss Jones and our cottage industries.

Such is our prospect in this day of inevitable change. Because our profession's little world of typography has not changed, we lament the "alienation of youth." But perhaps it is we who are estranged, and it may be that, thanks to "the sound of pictures," we can rejoin the world of today.

[11] "The Comprehensive High School: A Further Look." Bulletin of the NATIONAL ASSOCIATION OF SECONDARY SCHOOL PRINCIPALS, Vol. 51, No. 319 (May 1967), p. 32.

[12] Howard Lee Nostrand, "The Foreign Culture in a Model Foreign Language Sequence," *Florida FL Reporter*, Vol. 5, No. 3 (Fall 1967), pp. 11–12.

[13] See Marie-Georgette Steisel and Howard Lee Nostrand, *Filmed Recitations of French Literature: Evaluation of the Film and Cultural Commentary*, Seattle: University of Washington, 1964, pp. 18–20, 24–29 and *passim*. See also Howard Lee Nostrand et al., *Film-Recital of French Poems; Cultural Commentary*, Seattle: University of Washington, 1964, Introduction.

[14] "Except in a few institutions, the response of higher education generally to the new media has been feeble and half-hearted." Byron K. Trippet, "Who Remembers Carthage?" *College and University*, Vol. 42, No. 4 (Summer 1967), p. 417.